Paro's Story

Sughra Mehdi

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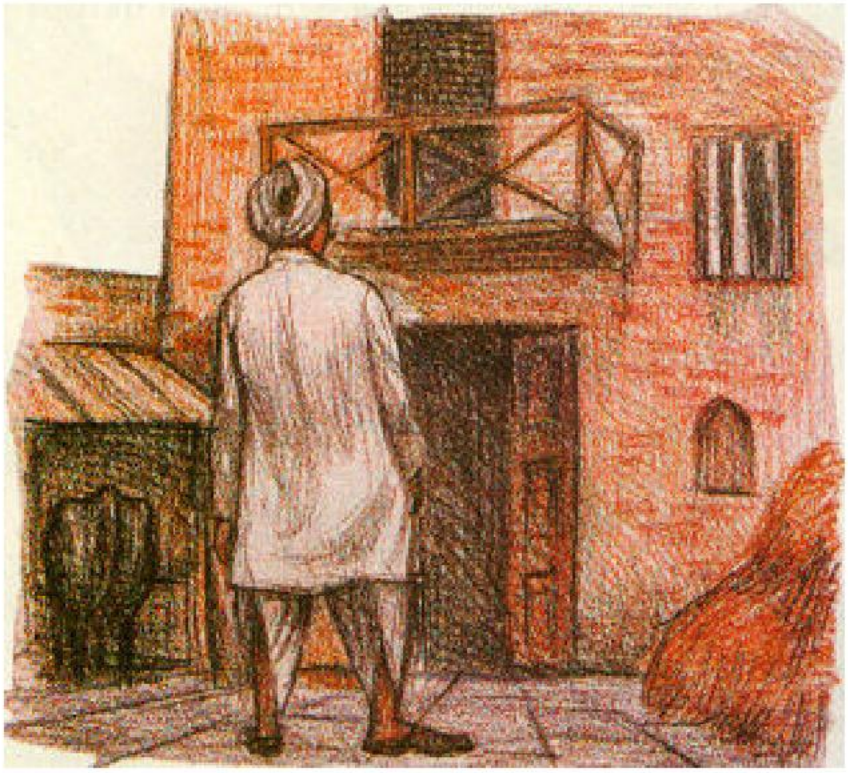
Sugra Mehdi’s life emphasizes the importance of high honor and courage in a woman's life. She is one of today's leading Urdu writers. Encouraged by her aunt, Sahiba Abid Hussain, she began writing at the age of 15. Her first novel was "Pa wa Jaolan.“ was published in 1973. She was deeply influenced by the difficult circumstances of a girl growing up amidst social evils. A better life for women is at the core of her stories. Her works inspire women to break free from the shackles of a conservative society. *Paro Ki Kahani* is a translation of one such Urdu story.

Nowadays, Sughra Mehdi teaches Urdu literature at Jamia Millia Islamia University, Delhi.

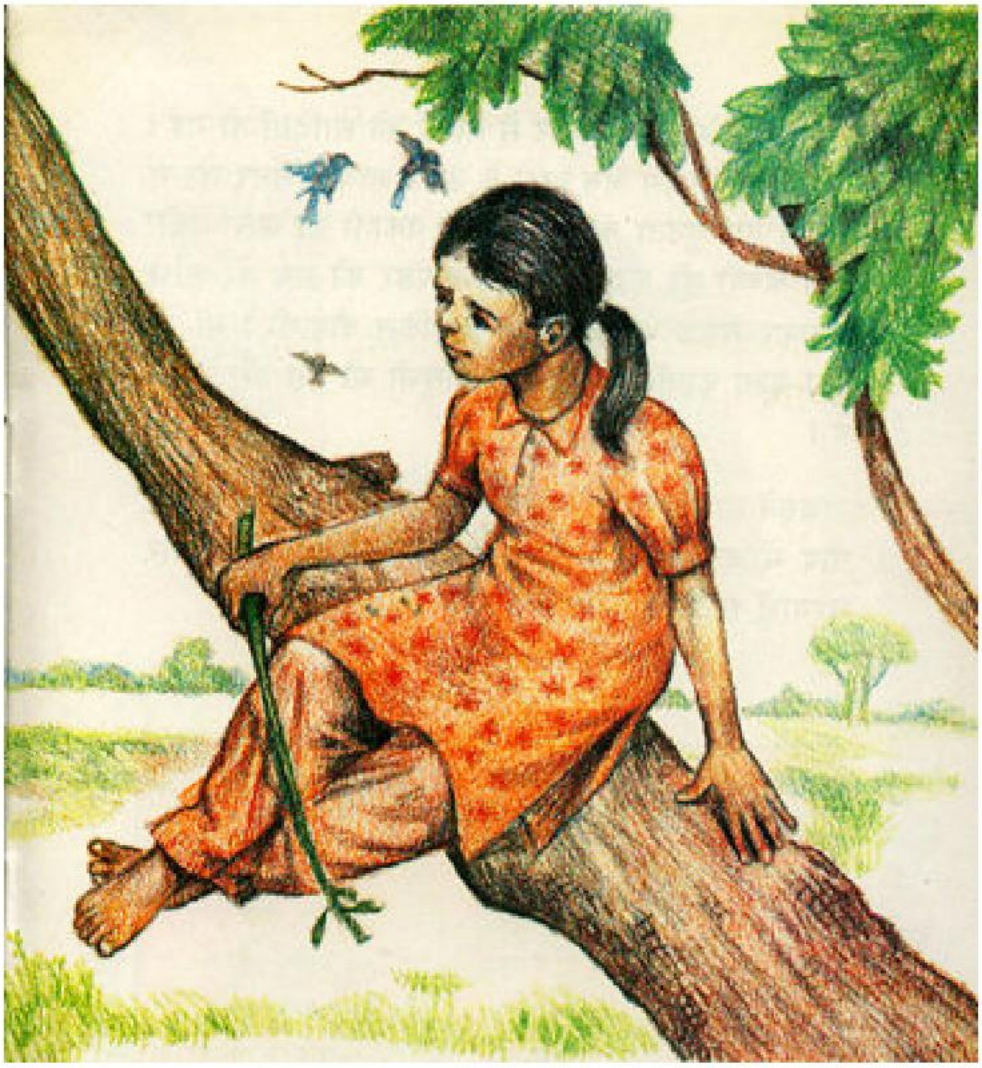
Paro's story



"Parbati , Parbati! Paro , Paro..." Babuji would call her. But she wouldn't respond until he called her *beta* (son).

Mother would get angry. “Hey! You're ruining her mind. A son is not in our destiny. She too will soon go to another home. If she doesn't keep quiet from now on, what will happen at her in-laws' house?”

Paro's four sisters would do household chores and whisper with their friends.



But Paro didn't feel like staying at home. She would wander outside. She would go to the fields with her father and graze the buffaloes.

The sisters got married a year apart. Then all the household chores fell on Paro. She felt suffocated at home. She would burn the rotis, and keep the dal uncooked. In the afternoons, she would ride her bicycle very fast, thus avoiding people's gaze. Her mother always scolded her, and now even her father had started scolding her.

When the sisters returned from their in-laws' homes after a year, they would be carrying a baby either in their arms or in their belly. Their mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law would endlessly crib and complain.

One year, after harvesting, Babuji went out to find a groom for Paro. Paro prayed to God and even made a vow of one and a quarter rupees that Babuji should not find a groom. And Babuji did not find one.

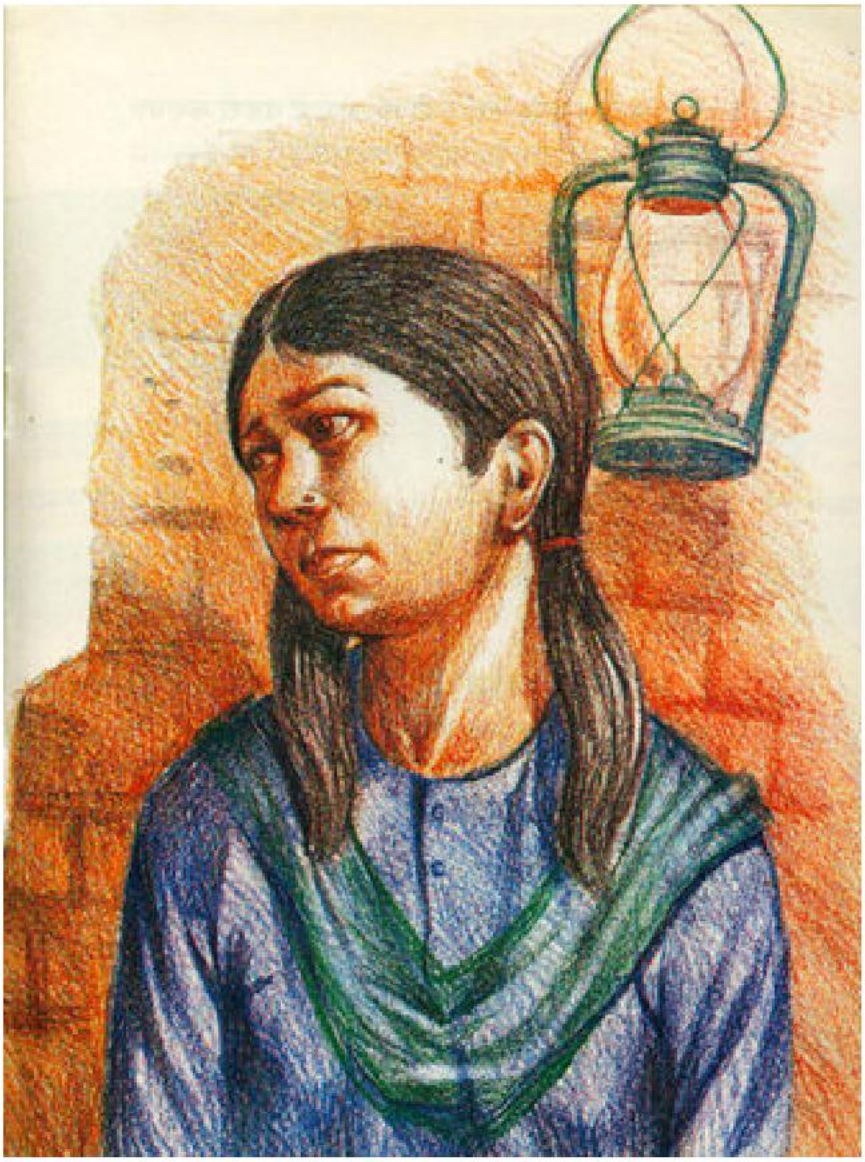
But what will happen to her now? She wondered.

Why should I make chapattis?

Why should I get married?

Why should I get beaten by a man?

Why should I be burdened with children?

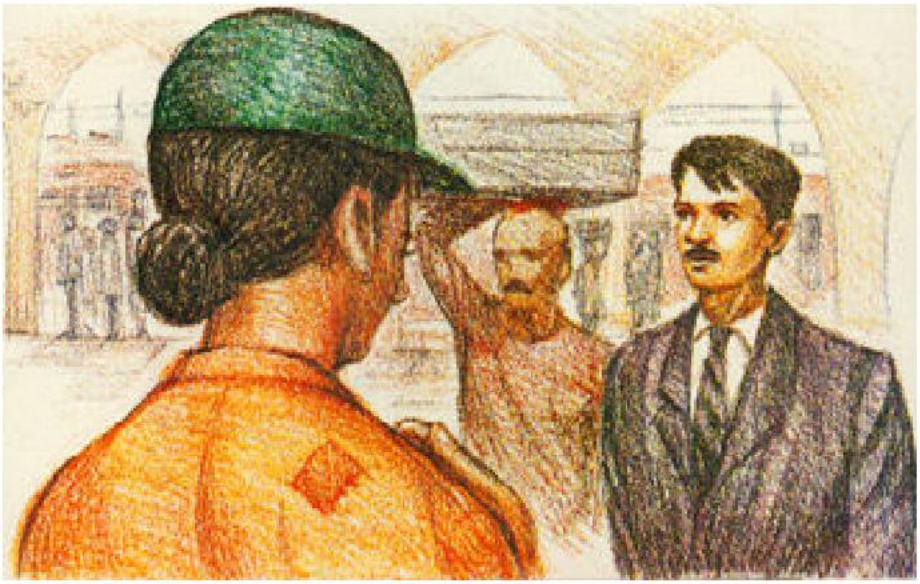


And one day, frightened by all this Paro fled the house and reached the city of Benaras.

In a new city, the same question kept plaguing her mind: What would she do now? Should she washing dishes and sew clothes in various households to make ends meet?

No! She had come all this way to escape from those boring chores. She had to do something that would make her happy.

Then she noticed the rickshaw pullers standing at the station. Paro decided that this would be the beginning of her new life.



It was almost a year since Paro had been in Banaras. The train pulled up at the station. Paro adjusted her cap, pulled up her trousers, and stood at the station gate. Passengers were leaving. Paro's eyes were scouting for a passenger. A young man wearing a coat and trousers was coming from the front. He had a office bag in hand, and a porter carried his luggage. Paro signaled to the porter. She had the luggage placed in her rickshaw and asked the young man to sit down.

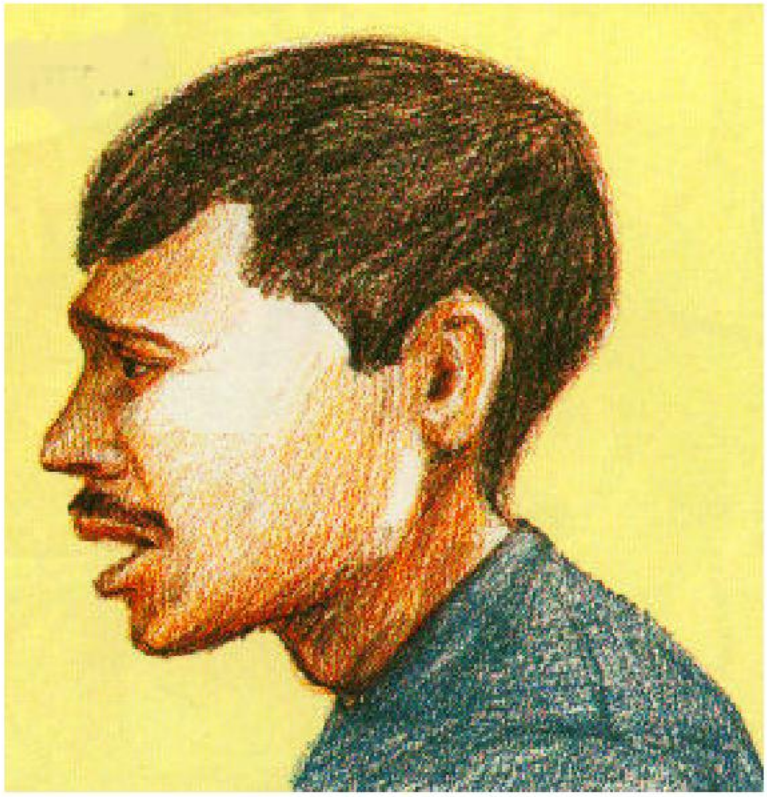
The young man paused. Then he said, “What will you take for Gammu Khan’s junction?”

“As much as you will give.”

"Hey! You... I mean... “ He was trying to look at her carefully.

"Babuji, my name is Paro."

“Paro!"



"Yes, Babuji, Paro. It will cost three rupees to Gammu Khan’s chowk."

"Okay. But what name did you tell me?" Yes, Paro!

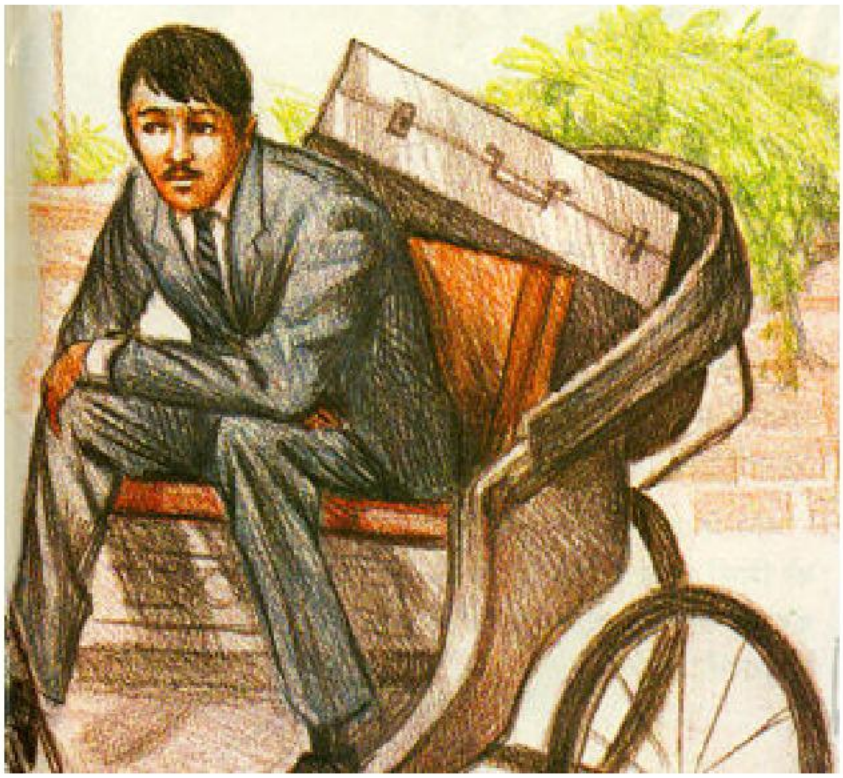
“Paro, why do you drive a rickshaw?"

“Babuji, do you have any problem with me driving a rickshaw?”

“No , but…”

“Okay Babuji, tell me, what work do you do?”

"Me? I work at a bank."



“But Babuji, why don't you work in the hospital?”

"But Paro, the thing is..."

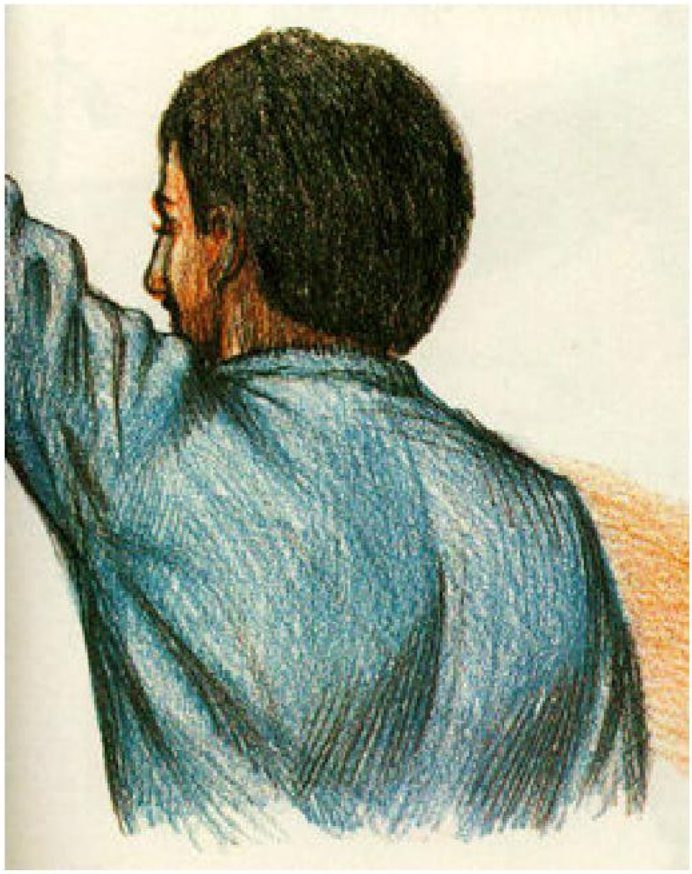
"Look, sir, everyone has their own work. Now sit quietly." Then Paro's rickshaw sailed with the wind.

"Here is Gammu Khan's crossing. Now give me the money." Taking the money, Paro left.

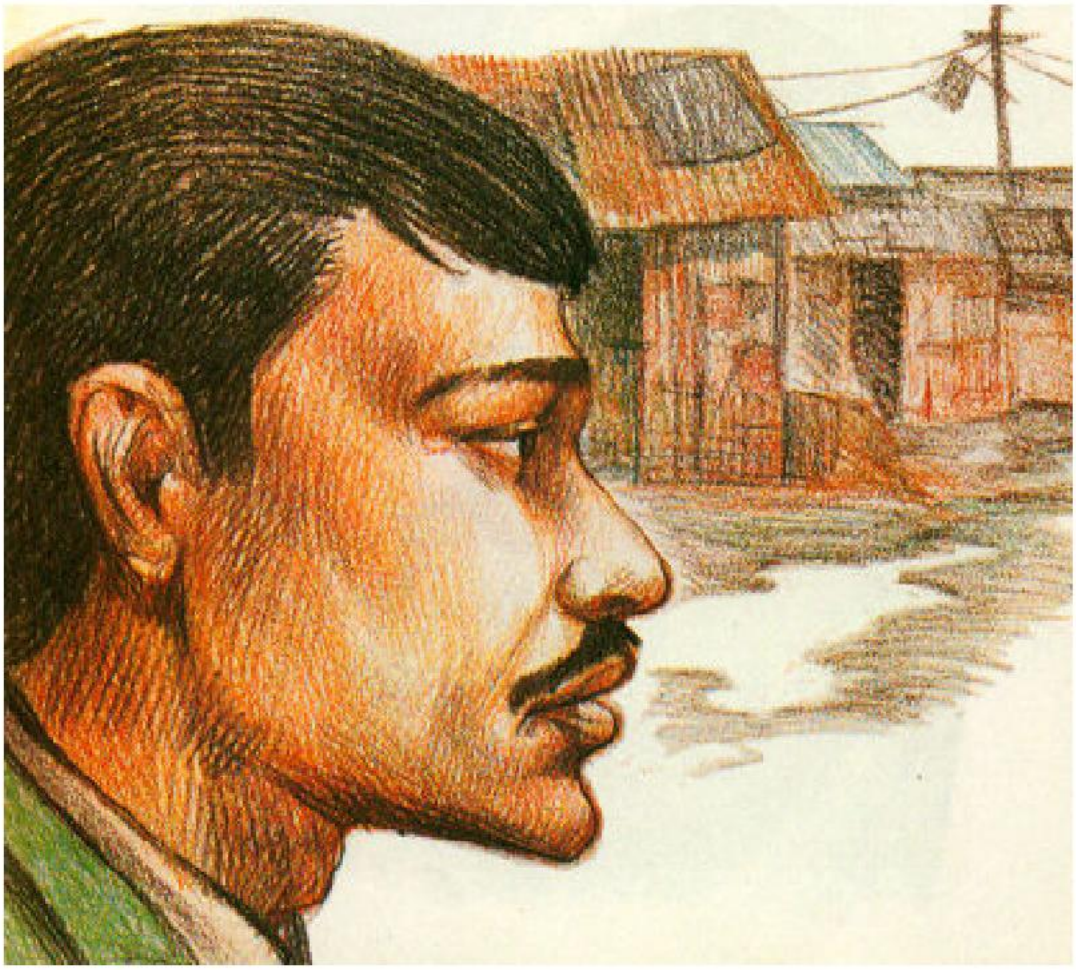
"Arif Bhai, what kind of city is this? Do women drive rickshaws here?"

"What a wonder! Looks like you came in that devil's rickshaw?" Mumani Amma hit her head. Arif Bhai smiled. "You must have found Paro. What a strong woman she is!"

In the village, we heard all sorts of stories about Paro: she's a prostitute, she destroyed her entire family by setting fire to her own house, she's mad, she's a witch...

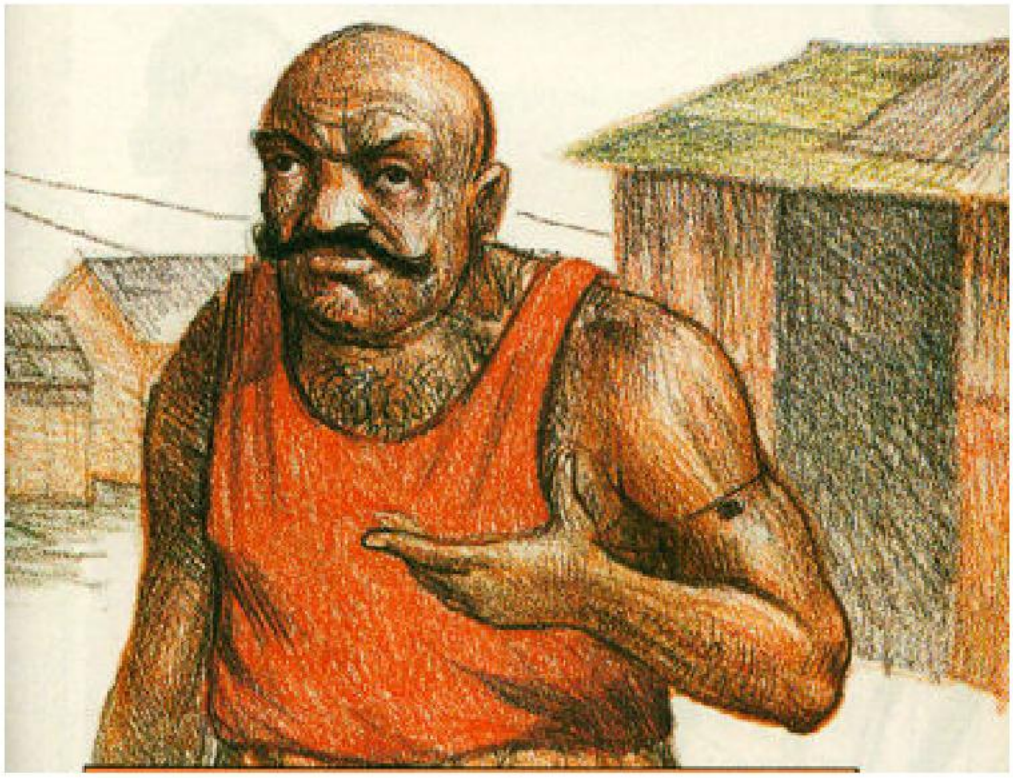


"She's a witch!" The young man believed in this. Because Paro had truly cast a spell on him. He now thought about her all the time. But Paro would see him from a distance and quickly drive away her rickshaw. And he would keep calling out to her.



Finally, one day, he found Paro's whereabouts. When he arrived, the room was locked from inside. Paro's rickshaw was parked outside.

He was trying to figure out how to knock on Paro's door. Just then, a wrestler with a large mustache and a pyjama emerged from the adjacent room.

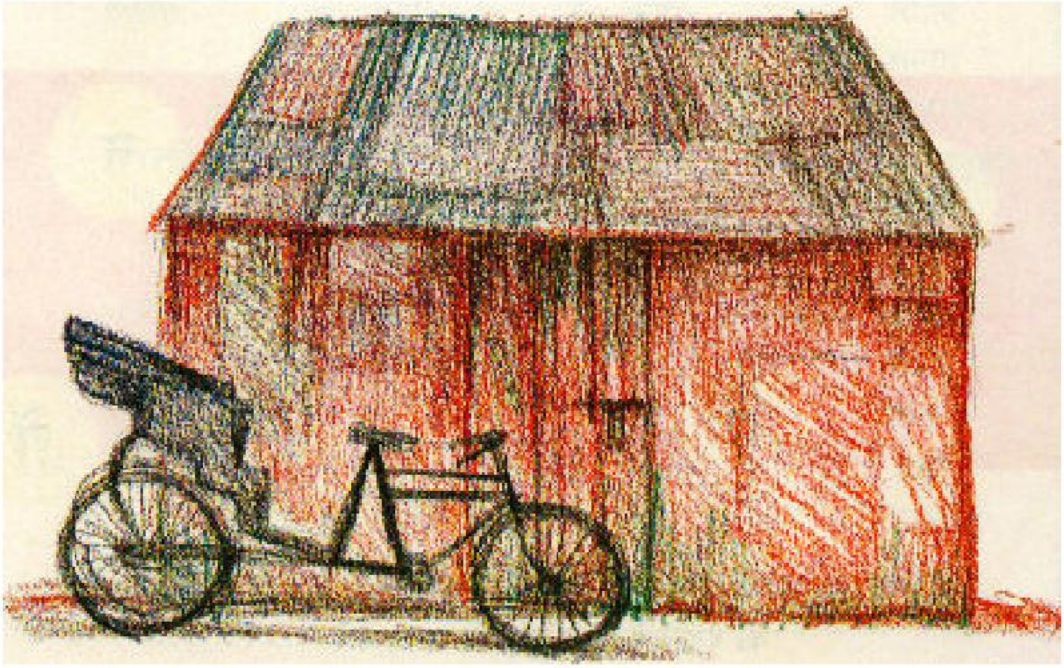


“Tell me, sir, what is the matter?”

“Yes , I… I mean I… have to meet Paro,” he was nervous.

“Want to meet Paro? But what do you want from her?"

Before he could answer anything, the door of Paro's room opened suddenly.



Paro stood in front of him saying angrily, "He has nothing to do. His stomach is aching wondering why Paro drives a rickshaw."

"No, Paro! Absolutely not, that's not the point. Listen, Paro."

"Enough, don't go on and on about Paro. Listen, carefully. I drive a rickshaw because I don't like cooking. I don't like washing dishes. I don't like getting beaten by a man. And Paro does what she likes. Understand?" And then the door slammed shut.